10: d'Orleans--347-348 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 527, 783, 796, 823

[LSS: During the New Year celebration in Luang Prabang.]

"Women sprinkle water over the chief bonze, and others bolder still, come and pour the contents of their jar over some young student. This custom of sprinkling or pouring water, which is also to be met with at certain festivals in Siam and Burmah, would not be so suprising if it were confined to the priests, but here the girls pick up mud and plaster the faces of the young men, whoever they may be, and our white dresses tempt them so much that we are obliged to assume a very stern look in order to keep them at a distance. The young men, however, are too gallant to resent these attentions, and as for the bonzes, they get something better than water offered them, as presents are made them in the shape of pans full of food, which are handed to two men who accompany the chair.

When the procession reaches Ouate Sieng Tong, it enters the courtyard, and the bonzes, after reciting [348] the usual prayers, enter a sort of shed surrounded by planks and having upon the top the same water conduit which has been used for sprinkling water over the gods. The women pour their water into this conduit, which flows down over the priests, who emerge from the shed purified and washed, but dripping wet, though this they do not seem to mind."

10: d'Orleans--353-354 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 644, 783, 823

[LSS: During the New Year celebration in Luang Prabang.]

"The king comes and greets us after he has taken his tea; he seems to be amiable and intelligent, but, as at all our other interviews, timid and ill at ease, especially with the Siamese Colonel upon the one side and us upon the other. As soon as our audience is over, he ascends the small wooden construction over which the water conduit is placed, and his servitors bring him one after the other several jugs of water which he pours into it and which trickle down, drop by drop, upon a Buddha placed on [354] a gilt chair in an adjoining building."

[touques].

The experts throw themselves on the stone, turning it over to see if its underside has been wetted. According to the arrangement of the dry spots, [41] deductions are drawn on the topography of the rice fields which will be flooded, or remain dry, and on the advantage of making rice fields either "high or low."

This sacrifice of the buffalo is found in the myth of Gavampati the strange monk held aloof by the Buddhist community because he took the attitude of being an enemy of the waters. His death allowed the arrival of the rains.

Khao Vassa (Feast of the Eighth Month).

This is the date of the beginning of the Buddhist Lent. During the three months of rains, not being able to go from one place to another preaching, the Buddha and his community retired into the park of the Jetavana. Besides the season of rains, as it awakens life everywhere, causes animals to swarm in great numbers. It is therefore impossible at this time of year to travel without violating, at each step, the precept which forbids the destruction of all existence, however infinitely small it may be. Thus, during this period, the bonzes may not leave the pagoda and are obliged to be present at the general confession.

Oldenberg describes this confession according to the Pali texts as follows:

"No monk may miss it. Only he who is stricken with mental alienation may be dispensed....By the light of a torch, the monks take their places at the place of assembly on low stools which have been prepared for them. Neither laymen nor student bonzes [bonzillons] nor nuns may be present, for the rule of the Order, to be recited in the form of a formula of confession, is considered in principle as a secret appurtenance of the monks only. This formula of confession, the Patimokkgam, is recited aloud by the oldest member [doyen].

"Oh Reverend one, whoever has committed a sin, may he confess it.... After the third time that the question has been repeated, if a monk does not confess a sin which [42] he has committed and which he remembers, he is guilty of an intentional lie. Now an intentional lie, oh reverend one, is an obstacle to religious life. Such are the words of the Blessed One."

Then there follows a list of the sins which must be confessed. At the head of the list are the most serious ones:

796 1. To have had carnal relations with anyone, even an animal.
2. To have stolen the property of others.
3. To have killed.
792 4. To have falsely usurped spiritual perfections, and with the intention of personal profit.

783 Then follows a list of lesser sins. When the enumeration is completed, the reader addresses the monks, repeating three times the following question:

"Now, I ask the reverend ones: Are you free of these sins? And for the second time: Are you pure? And for the third time I ask: Are you pure?" If everyone is silent, the reader says: "The reverend Ones are free of these sins, therefore they are silent, that is how I understand it."

In this way are catalogued in more than two hundred paragraphs, without much order, the precepts dealing with the daily life of the monks, their housing, their food and drink. No detail however irrelevant or insignificant is omitted.

In Laos as in Cambodia "during the entire rainy season, a taper of the Vassa must burn in each pagoda. This consists of a more or less richly carved, painted, wooden cylinder into which is poured virgin wax around a wick" (E. Porée-Maspéro). Before going into retreat, the bonzes are given garments, then the people form a procession and enter the pagodas where they deposit their taper.

196 [43] Ho Khao Padap Dinh--the Feast of the Dead of the Ninth Month

773 This feast is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the waning moon of the ninth month and is accompanied by offerings to the bonzes.

735 A Jataka (Sadhitissaraja) taken from the Ha Sip Xat tells us the benefits acquired by celebrating this feast.

"Two poor devout Buddhist woodcutters sold the produce of their labor and bought two large urns. Into them they put some rice, a few pieces of sugar cane, two bowls, four bananas, some meat and fish, and some delicacies. They offered all this to a bonze on the day of the feast of the dead and vowed to be born again in a better state. As a result of this act of charity they were born again into a royal family. The husband became king and his wife queen. The Buddha then said to those who were listening to this story: "When an act of charity is done for the feast of the dead, one attains three blisses: the terrestrial bliss of being king, the celestial bliss of becoming Indra and finally the supreme bliss of Nirvana."